

PART 2

ELITE STUDIES

Introduction

The three studies in Part II were carried out among the university educated elite and focus was upon marriage and conjugal relationships. Eugenia Date-Bah describes aspects of the marriages of fifty lecturers at the University of Ghana. She attempts to compare those of the West Africans, mainly Ghanaians, with those of their expatriate counterparts. The other two papers both analyse students' attitudes and highlight important areas of continuity and change, particularly with respect to the conjugal division of labour. In each paper areas of conflict between the sexes are noted. An important point Mr Kumekpor underlines is that, an increase in the number of marriages contracted in church or under the Marriage Ordinance in West Africa does not necessarily imply fundamental changes in attitudes towards the values and obligations inherent in traditional family and marriage institutions.

CHAPTER 4

SOME FEATURES OF MARRIAGE PATTERNS AMONG THE MEMBERS OF ONE ELITE GROUP IN GHANA

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The changes which are occurring in the marriage behaviour and families of West Africans as a result of the rapid social change going on here have been widely reported. ¹These changes have been found to be much more prevalent in the urban areas than in the rural areas and among the educated more than the illiterate folk. It may also be that the extent of these changes is not the same for the various social classes or occupational groups in the society. For example, in a study of some 38 factory workers in Accra, it was found that only two out of this number had contracted marriages registered under the ordinance (Date Bah, 1972). It may be expected then that the marriage behaviour of the members of a more elite occupational group would reflect these changes to a greater extent. This paper simply aims at describing some of the features of the marriage pattern of members of one elite occupational group in Ghana, namely lecturers at the University of Ghana.

Method:

Questionnaires were mailed to a simple random sample of approximately 140 lecturers at Legon. (This figure forms about a third of the total number of teaching staff of the University). The response rate was very low. Replies were received from 60 people and this number included those who had never married as well as three Indians and one Iraqi. The single people were excluded from the analysis because we were interested in the marriage behaviour of married people. The Asians were also not included in the analysis because a primary concern of the study was to throw light on the degree of Westernization of the marriage behaviour of the Ghanaian members of this occupational group. The final number of responses upon which this paper is based is therefore 50. These 50 lecturers were married and were made up of 25 West Africans, (23 Ghanaians, 1 Nigerian and 1 Gambian) and 25 European/Americans (13 Europeans, predominantly British and 12 North Americans). Owing to the low response rate to the mailed questionnaire, I would like to sound a caveat that what will be said in this paper may not be very representative of the whole population of teaching staff in the University of Ghana.

The 50 lecturers were predominantly male. There were only 8 females among them. The majority of them (80 per cent) were between the ages of 30 and 54 and the remaining few were in the age groups 55—59 and 25—29. A high portion of them (68 per cent) were Christian, 22 per cent atheists, 6 per cent agnostics and 4 per cent Jews. There was no Moslem in the group. The respondents also came from varying backgrounds including two other West Africans.

Table I shows that the occupational group of University lecturers studied, draws its members from diverse social backgrounds. The majority of Ghanaian respondents have fathers who are

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farmers or in teaching/clerical jobs. The European/Americans come from farming and high professional backgrounds. Only two respondents have fathers who are/or were in the same occupation as themselves.

All except one Ghanaian respondent were married according to church or civil law. Most of the Ghanaians had first gone through customary marriage rites.

Church wedding were most popular. 60 per cent of the respondents including a few of the self-styled atheists have gone through this type of ceremony. One of the reasons given for choosing a civil ceremony was that the respondents did not want the type of large wedding associated with the church ceremony. Some of the respondents who belonged to different religions from their spouses or who had no religious affiliation saw the registry wedding as the only form acceptable to them.

TABLE 1
Occupation of Respondents' Fathers

<i>Father's Occupation</i>	<i>Total %</i>	<i>Ghanaians %</i>	<i>Europeans/Americans %</i>
Priest/Mission workers	8	4	4
Farmers/Craftsmen	34	20	14
Clerks/Teacher/Education Officer	16	10	6
Lecturers/Professors	4	0	4
Businessmen	8	6	2
Lawyers/Engineers/Accountants/Pilots	12	2	10
Sales	4	2	2
Social Workers	4	0	4
Civil Servants	8	4	4
Labourers/Domestic Servants	2	2	0
Total	100%	50%	50%

TABLE 2
Types of Marriage of the Respondents

<i>Type of Marriage</i>	<i>Total</i>		<i>Ghanaians</i>		<i>European/Americans</i>	
	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
Church	30	60	14	28	16	32
Registry	15	30	8	16	7	14
Registry & Church	4	8	2	4	2	4
Mutual consent/just living together	1	2	1	2	0	0
Total	50	100	25	50	25	50

Among the respondents who had church weddings, there were eight respondents who had the church wedding because their wives demanded it. There were also three cases where the respondents had church weddings to satisfy their parents. In connection with the type of marriage

contracted therefore, it can safely be said that there is no difference between the Ghanaian lecturers and their European/American counterparts in the sample.

There is no Ghanaian respondent in a purely customary marriage. This absence of purely traditional or customary marriage among the Ghanaian respondents in the study contrasts sharply with what the marriage pattern found among some 38 factory workers studied previously (Date-Bah, 1972).

Only two of these factory workers were in Ordinance Marriages while 40 per cent had contracted traditional customary marriages. Ordinance Marriage in Ghana tends to vary from class to class or it tends to be class-linked. A possible explanation is that the expense involved in Ordinance Marriages limits them to the high occupational groups who can afford to have them.

Role played by Parents in the choice of Marriage partners and in the marriage arrangements and ceremony:

In the case of 90 per cent the parents did not play any role at all in their choice of marriage partners and in the case of the remaining 10 per cent, the parents' role took the form of encouragement and advice. Individual choice of marital partners is thus very common among the Ghanaian members of this group, contrary to what may be happening in the case of their rural brethren. It is interesting to note however that there is one Ghanaian respondent in the group who has two children with the woman he is living with, but has not as yet gone through any formal marriage ceremony with her because his parents would not agree to his marrying that woman.

Concerning the marriage arrangement and ceremony, 70 per cent said their parents did not play any role here. In the case of several Ghanaians, their parents performed the engagement or customary rites on their behalf and also gave them some financial help. In the case of several European and nine Americans, the role played by the parents took the form of arranging or organizing a party for them after the wedding and also giving them some financial assistance in connection with the wedding ceremony. Thus the parents' giving of financial help occurred in both groups. It may be that some of the weddings took place far from where the parents lived thus preventing them from giving any help.

Marriage Markets:

The most recurrent situations where the European/Americans met their spouses were "dance/party," "voluntary and other meetings" and the "University." For the Ghanaian respondents the situations most frequently mentioned were "friend or relative's house," "dance/party" and "grew up together." It appears then that residential propinquity was not really an important factor in the mate selection of members of this occupational group. The factor which appears to be important is the meeting or coming together of the couple. Residential propinquity is just one of the factors which make for this but there are numerous other factors which can also bring about this meeting some of which are "dance/party," "attending the same school or University," "meeting at a friend or relative's house" or an association meeting.

Inter-National Marriages:

Thirty per cent of all the respondents had married spouses of different nationalities. These included couples who were German-Ghanaian, Ghanaian-American, English-Ugandan or English-Nigerian. In contrast only one spouse had parents of different nationalities.

TABLE 3

Situations where respondents met their spouses

<i>Situation</i>	<i>Total</i>		<i>Ghanaians</i>		<i>Europeans/Americans</i>	
	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
Dance/Party	14	28	5	10	9	18
University/School/Library	7	14	2	4	5	10
Voluntary and other meetings, Professional meetings/sports	8	16	2	4	6	12
Friend or relative's house or flat	8	16	6	12	2	4
Students' Hostel	3	6	2	4	1	2
At work	3	6	1	2	2	4
In spouse's home	2	4	2	4	0	0
Accidentally in town	2	4	2	4	0	0
Grew up together	3	6	3	6	0	0
Total	50	100	25	50	25	50

In addition the percentage of inter-ethnic marriages among the Ghanaian respondents was quite high. Twenty out of the 25 Ghanaians had married their fellow nationals and in eight out of the 20 cases husband and wife were of different ethnic groups. This increase in inter-ethnic marriages among the Ghanaians may be related to the diverse situations in which the respondents meet their spouses (of. Omari, 1963).

Age at marriage:

Table 4 indicates that the European/American respondents tended to marry slightly earlier than their Ghanaian counterparts. This may be explained by the fact that most of the Ghanaians married after the completion of their formal education; while quite a number of the European/Americans married in the course of their formal education. Also the Ghanaians, until recently, were going to school at a later age than their European/American counterparts. These two factors together may account in some way for the difference between the two groups with respect to their ages at marriage.

For most of the respondents husband and wife, there were differences in the ages of the seven exceptions six were European or Americans.

Among the European/Americans the number who are older than their spouses by more than 6 years is smaller than among the Ghanaian respondents.

Table 6 indicates that the European/Americans having met their future spouses, waited for shorter periods than the Ghanaians before marrying them. Thus twenty European/Americans in contrast to six Ghanaians married their spouses three or fewer years after meeting them. This may be related to the fact that the Ghanaians often waited to marry till the completion of their education.

Educational Level of Spouses:

All marriage partners had some formal education. Most of the Ghanaians (23 out of 25 cases) had spouses with lower education than themselves. Of the European/Americans only 10 out of the 25 respondents had spouses with lower education than themselves, the remaining 15 spouses had the same level of education (See Table 7).

Occupation of Spouses:

Most of the wives had occupations although some were not at the time of study, pursuing them. Only 20 per cent of the respondents then had wives who were full-time housewives. Thirty per cent of the spouses with occupation were teachers or nurses while 44 per cent were lecturers/librarians/bankers and other high professionals. (All the 8 female respondents had their husbands in the latter occupational category). The remaining 6 per cent were civil servants.

TABLE 4
Respondents' ages at Marriage and Nationality

<i>Age</i>	<i>Total</i>		<i>Ghanaians</i>		<i>Europeans/Americans</i>	
	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
Below 25	12	24	1	2	11	22
25—28	18	36	12	24	6	12
29—31	8	16	3	6	5	10
32—34	11	22	8	16	3	6
35—37	0	0	0	0	0	0
38—40	1	2	1	2	0	0
Total	50	100	25	50	25	50

TABLE 5
Gaps between spouses' ages and those of respondents

<i>Age of spouse</i>	<i>Total</i>		<i>Ghanaians</i>		<i>Europeans/Americans</i>	
	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
Same as respondent	7	14	1	2	6	12
Less 1—2 years	11	22	5	10	6	12
Less 3—5 years	10	20	5	10	5	10
Less 6—8 years	10	20	8	16	2	4
Less 9—11 years	6	12	4	8	2	4
More 1—2 years	6	12	2	4	4	8
More 3—5 years	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	50	100	25	50	25	50

Family size:

Half had 2 or 3 children, 24 per cent 4 to 5 children, 12 per cent 1 child and 4 per cent had 6 children. Five couples had no children at the time of the study.

There was no difference between the Ghanaian respondents and the European/American lecturers in the study with respect to number of children. There were however, great differences between the Ghanaian respondents and their fathers in this respect. Almost half of the Ghanaians had fathers with more than 9 children. This included one Akan farmer who had 30 children with his 7 wives. The large numbers of children of the Ghanaian fathers were usually associated with polygynous marriage. The Ghanaian respondents had smaller families than those of their fathers. However they were comparatively young and might not have finished reproducing. While 60 per cent of the fathers of the European/Americans had only 3 or fewer children, only three of the Ghanaian respondents fathers had such small families.

TABLE 6
Years between meeting and marrying

<i>Length of time</i>	<i>Total</i>		<i>Ghanaians</i>		<i>Europeans/Americans</i>	
	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
Less than 1 year	2	4	1	2	1	2
1 year	11	22	2	4	9	18
2 years	8	16	2	4	6	12
3 years	5	10	1	2	4	8
4 years	6	12	3	6	3	6
5 years	5	10	3	6	2	4
6 years	2	4	2	4	0	0
7 years	2	4	2	4	0	0
8 years	7	14	7	14	0	0
9 & 9 + years	2	4	2	4	0	0
Total	50	100	25	50	25	50

TABLE 7
Level of Spouses Education

<i>Level of Education</i>	<i>Total</i>		<i>Ghanaian</i>		<i>European/Americans</i>	
	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
Middle School/General Studies	1	2	1	2	0	0
Commercial/'O' Level	5	10	3	6	2	4
'A' Level/Cert. 'A' and post Sec.						
Teaching and Nursing	12	24	11	22	1	2
A.I.B./A.L.A./Institute of Manage-						
ment & Dip. Ed. BA/BSc.	15	30	8	16	7	14
M.A./Ph.D.	17	34	2	4	15	30
Total	50	100	25	50	25	50

Seven of the Ghanaians had children by previous unions. Only two out of the fifty respondents admitted they had ever been divorced. Both were Europeans.

Conclusions:

In the small sample of lecturers studied the major differences between the Ghanaian/West Africans and the European/Americans with regard to marriage seem to be age at marriage, educational level of spouses and the existence of "outside issues," children born to other unions in 7 of the 25 marriages in the Ghanaian group. Among the latter there is a marked trend marrying educated people, contracting ordinance marriages, entering into ethnically mixed marriages and having individual choice of marriage partners and, thus a movement away from family arranged marriages. Associated factors appear to be education and mobility. The more educated they are, the more they see the need to marry people who are also educated to make for effective communication between them. Their high education too has enabled them to realise some of the problems involved in the purely traditional customary type of marriage. The Ghanaian members of this occupational group represent one of the most mobile groups in the society. For they are people who usually have travelled and lived for some time outside the country, and even before this period, they had moved from the rural areas to various towns and cities for their secondary education. This extensive amount of mobility has opened a big area to them which was completely absent in the lives of their parents. This, for example, has brought them into contact with people who come not only from different ethnic groups but also different nationalities and races. This is the factor related to the quite high incidence of inter-ethnic international marriages among the respondents and their non-occurrence among their parents. Increase in geographical mobility again may be the factor which accounts for the difference between the European/American respondents and their parents with respect to the incidence of mixed marriages.

The extent of the influence of mobility on the marriage patterns of such elite groups needs further examination. It is hoped that further research will help to throw light on this and similar issues.

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